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REALISM IN PSALM 23: 1-3.

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The realist and the idealist in art work from the same motive, to make truth effective upon character, but while the idealist does this by presenting the ideal for us to admire and strive after, the realist believes that to present life just as it is with all its blemishes as well as its virtues is the best way to attain the object of art by vividly drawing the contrast between what is and what should be, and so leading us to strive for the ideal. This realism may be carried too far, as when a few years ago an artist exhibited his collection of paintings representing in minute detail all the horrors of war and public executions, for the avowed purpose of making war and capital punishment so odious that they would be abolished. The public was shocked by the exhibition and declined to be taught in that way.

But though realism in art may be carried too far, there is a growing demand that art should be in a proper degree realistic, that it should in its presentations conform more to facts, or at least to probabilities. We demand of the historical painter that he should so familiarize himself with the historical setting in time and place of the incident he attempts to paint that he will introduce no anachronisms nor *outlandishisms* in furniture, dress or physiognomy, and we demand this in the presentation of sacred scenes as much as in any other. We demand such careful study of probabilities as Munkacsy has shown in the details of his "Christ before Pilate." We can forgive the great masters, though they sinned grievously in this respect, because of their many other virtues, and because they perhaps knew no better. We may even forgive the old illustrated German Bible that in its engraving of Samson and the lion put in the background a man shooting birds with a gun. But henceforth let no artist people Bible scenes with chubby-faced Dutch men and women, or paint the

Madonna seated in a high-backed chair, or the Twelve at the last supper sitting upright in European style along one side of a long deal table. We should rather imitate the faithful realism of the artists of the ancient courts of Egypt and Assyria on whose monuments we can distinguish at once the Ethiopian captive from the Jew, and both from their conquerors, by dress and physiognomy. Their art was rude, but so far as it went, was true to the life of the times. They did not make the mistake of supposing that all men and all scenery the world over were Assyrian or Egyptian.

It is some such mistake as this that the translators of the English Bible have made in their rendering of the first three verses of the twenty-third Psalm. By the rendering they have given to a single word, they have given us an English scene where they should have given us a Palestinian one. They have not been true to the time and country in which the psalm was written and so have not been true to life.

What is the picture that we have in the English translation, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters"? Is it not that of a beautiful English meadow by the side of a calm lake or quiet deep-flowing stream, an ideal picture of abundance and ease? But such a scene could hardly be found in all Palestine. There, with the exception of the large bodies of Tiberias and the Dead Sea, the one bitter as brine and both shadeless under a burning sun, the "still waters" are the stagnant waters, either the marshes of the Huleh or the dirty village pools, the common resort of the town for drinking or washing for cattle and men, more suggestive of buffalo wallows than of English lakes and meadows. If then we accept the English translation, "still waters," we have a picture that from the oriental standpoint is either idealistic but untrue to nature, or realistic at the expense of beauty.

But if we change a single word and, keeping closer to the Hebrew original, read instead of "still waters," the words "the waters of rest," or more literally, "of resting places," which is the form also in the Arabic translation, we shall have a picture at once realistic, *i. e.*, true to oriental life, and not less beautiful

than the other and at the same time more true as a type of spiritual experience. "He leadeth me beside the *waters of rest*." The reference here is to the waters of the noon-tide rest, some sparkling spring or babbling brook, coursing down the valley between its grassy banks and under the shade of its own tangled growth of bushes and trees, where the sheep that have been feeding all the morning on the scanty herbage of the hills above, under a blazing sun, are gathered in by the shepherds at this hottest time of the day to enjoy a cool and refreshing hour.

The psalm thus rendered recalls the scene we once witnessed at the 'Ain Mousa, or Spring of Moses, in the Wady Mousa in Moab near the foot of Mt. Nebo. We had spent the morning in a ride from Medeba to view the Promised Land as Moses viewed it, and at noon descended to 'Ain Mousa for an hour's rest before returning to Medeba. 'Ain Mousa is a copious spring of clear, cold water gushing from the side of a great rock, its banks lined with mosses and cresses, and shaded with oleander and fig. We had not been here long when a dozen flocks of sheep and goats were seen in different directions making their way down the steep sides of the valley to the spring. The sun had served as their clock to tell them the proper time, and here for an hour they drank the cool water or lay in the shade of the bushes or nibbled the tender grass and twigs. This was the restoration of soul of which the psalm speaks. What it was to them we knew, not only from their actions, but from our own feelings, for we too had been climbing for hours on the hills above, and were now bathing, drinking the cool water, lunching and resting; in a word, restoring our souls beside the "waters of rest."

But most interesting of all it was, to see here the illustration of the next line of the psalm. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The "paths of righteousness" are the paths of *duty*. When these sheep and goats had had their hour of rest and refreshment, it was a remarkable sight to see their preparations for returning to the hills. Apparently without signal from the shepherds, the patriarch of each flock took his stand at some distance from the brook facing up the hillside in the direction from which he had come. One by one

the rest fell in leisurely behind him, till each flock stood ready in single file or column of twos, according as they had been trained, the sheep by themselves, and the goats by themselves, or, as I noticed in one flock, in column of twos made up of sheep and goats, with the sheep in the left-hand file and the goats on the right. And then, when the shepherds had stirred up the few laggards that were still indulging themselves, forgetful of duty, in the shade of the bushes, the columns moved slowly off up the hillsides without breaking their files till they reached the plateau above. We could hardly be persuaded that it was not a sense of duty that the shepherds had imparted to them that led these sheep to turn away from the water and shade and still abundant grass to browse on the stony hills where the sun was still shining with almost noon-day heat.

The psalm with its translation changed as suggested is true to nature. Is it not also more true to spiritual experience? Few if any of us in our spiritual experience live always "in clover." A continual pasturing beside "still waters" is a type realized in few lives. But hours of refreshment, of restoration of soul beside the *waters of rest*, are common experiences, and it is common experience also to have to turn away from such refreshment, to walk again in the paths of righteousness, to take up the practical duties of life, to bear the heat and burden of the day, to earn the daily bread for ourselves and those dependent upon us, often by scanty pickings and amid uncomfortable surroundings. It is such experiences as these that give value to the hour of rest, and the shepherd psalmist had some such scene in mind when he wrote :

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures :

"He leadeth me beside the waters of rest.

"He restoreth my soul :

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."